

**UNITED STATES BANKRUPTCY COURT  
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF TEXAS  
HOUSTON DIVISION**

<b>In re:</b>  <b>WATSON GRINDING &amp; MANUFACTURING CO.</b>  <b>Debtors</b>	§ § § § § § §	<b>Chapter 11</b>  <b>Case No. 20-30967 (MI)</b>
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<b>In re:</b>  <b>WATSON VALVE SERVICES, INC.</b>  <b>Debtor.</b>	§ § § § § § §	<b>Chapter 11</b>  <b>Case No. 20-30968 (MI)</b>
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**JANUARY 24 CLAIMANTS COMMITTEE'S EMERGENCY MOTION FOR  
APPOINTMENT OF CHAPTER 11 TRUSTEES**

**THIS MOTION SEEKS AN ORDER THAT MAY ADVERSELY AFFECT YOU. IF YOU OPPOSE THE MOTION, YOU SHOULD IMMEDIATELY CONTACT THE MOVING PARTY TO RESOLVE THE DISPUTE. IF YOU AND THE MOVING PARTY CANNOT AGREE, YOU MUST FILE A RESPONSE AND SEND A COPY TO THE MOVING PARTY. YOU MUST FILE AND SERVE YOUR RESPONSE WITHIN 21 DAYS OF THE DATE THIS MOTION WAS SERVED ON YOU. YOUR RESPONSE MUST STATE WHY THE MOTION SHOULD NOT BE GRANTED. IF YOU DO NOT FILE A TIMELY RESPONSE, THE RELIEF MAY BE GRANTED WITHOUT FURTHER NOTICE TO YOU. IF YOU OPPOSE THE MOTION AND HAVE NOT REACHED AN AGREEMENT, YOU MUST ATTEND THE HEARING. UNLESS THE PARTIES AGREE OTHERWISE, THE COURT MAY CONSIDER EVIDENCE AT THE HEARING AND MAY DECIDE THE MOTION AT THE HEARING.**

**EMERGENCY RELIEF HAS BEEN REQUESTED. IF THE COURT CONSIDERS THE MOTION ON AN EMERGENCY BASIS, THEN YOU WILL HAVE LESS THAN 21 DAYS TO ANSWER. IF YOU OBJECT TO THE REQUESTED RELIEF OR IF YOU BELIEVE THAT THE EMERGENCY CONSIDERATION IS NOT WARRANTED, YOU SHOULD FILE AN IMMEDIATE RESPONSE.**

**PLEASE NOTE THAT ON MARCH 24, 2020, THROUGH THE ENTRY OF GENERAL ORDER 2020-10, THE COURT INVOKED THE PROTOCOL FOR EMERGENCY PUBLIC HEALTH OR SAFETY CONDITIONS.**

**IT IS ANTICIPATED THAT ALL PERSONS WILL APPEAR TELEPHONICALLY AND ALSO MAY APPEAR VIA VIDEO AT THIS HEARING. AUDIO COMMUNICATION**

**WILL BE BY USE OF THE COURT'S REGULAR DIAL-IN NUMBER. THE DIAL-IN NUMBER IS +1 (832) 917-1510. YOU WILL BE RESPONSIBLE FOR YOUR OWN LONG-DISTANCE CHARGES. YOU WILL BE ASKED TO KEY IN THE CONFERENCE ROOM NUMBER. JUDGE ISGUR'S CONFERENCE ROOM NUMBER IS 954554.**

**PARTIES MAY PARTICIPATE IN ELECTRONIC HEARINGS BY USE OF AN INTERNET CONNECTION. THE INTERNET SITE IS WWW.JOIN.ME. PERSONS CONNECTING BY MOBILE DEVICE WILL NEED TO DOWNLOAD THE FREE JOIN.ME MOTION.**

**ONCE CONNECTED TO WWW.JOIN.ME, A PARTICIPANT MUST SELECT "JOIN A MEETING". THE CODE FOR JOINING THIS HEARING BEFORE JUDGE ISGUR IS "judgeisgur". THE NEXT SCREEN WILL HAVE A PLACE FOR THE PARTICIPANT'S.**

**To the Honorable Marvin Isgur,  
United States Bankruptcy Judge:**

The Official Committee of January 24 Claimants (the "Committee") files this *Emergency Motion for Appointment of Chapter 11 Trustees* (the "Motion").

### **SUMMARY**

1. At the first day hearing, the Court immediately recognized that there were certain inherent conflicts of interest between the estates of Watson Grinding & Manufacturing Co. ("WGM") and Watson Valve Services, Inc. ("WVS"), and ordered that separate counsel be retained by each Debtor. Those conflicts continue to exist and have ripened to such a degree that the Committee believes the estates can no longer function without the appointment of independent fiduciaries.

2. John Watson is the majority owner of both WGM and WVS, but until the last two weeks all decision making authority for the Debtors rested in Bob White, the chief operating officer. To that end, Mr. White signed both Debtors' schedules and statements of financial affairs and appeared as the companies' representative at their meetings of creditors. This arrangement came to a screeching halt in Mid-May. Specifically, after employing an investment banker to explore a sale of WVS, John Watson struck a side deal with a prospective bidder, which provided

a \$1 million payment directly to Watson in the form of a “non-compete.” Thereafter, Bob White and his son submitted a competing *higher* bid through a newly formed entity to acquire WVS’s assets. Immediately upon learning of the competing bid, John Watson retaliated against Bob White and his son by terminating their employment with both Debtors, effectively removing Bob White as the estates’ representative and supplanting himself in those roles.

3. Since John Watson’s unilateral termination of Bob White and appointment of himself as the sole estate “fiduciary,” things have been amiss. The Debtors actions and approach to routine matters have been marred by delay, inconsistency and conflict. The Debtors’ counsel, who the Committee firmly believes is making every effort to ensure that the Debtors are exercising their fiduciary duties, are being asked to take positions that run directly contrary to the interests of the estates and pursue objectives that benefit insiders at the expense of creditors and fly in the face of the fiduciary responsibilities afforded estate representatives. In sum, the Committee believes that John Watson is incapable of fulfilling his fiduciary duties to the estates. Instead of maximizing the value of the estates, he is focused on maximizing his personal recovery and protecting his and his children’s interest. For the reasons set forth below, the Committee requests the Court appoint chapter 11 trustees in both the WGM and WVS cases.

### **BASIS FOR EMERGENCY CONSIDERATION**

4. WVS filed an emergency motion seeking to provide significant bid protections to Mogas Industries, Inc. (“Mogas”) on less than 24 hours’ notice in order to protect the Mogas offer, which (as modified) includes a \$300,000 payment to him individually and employment for his son, from being outbid by the Whites who have submitted a competing bid to purchase WVS. Despite the fact that the motion for bid procedures was filed without Mogas having even submitted a signed APA, Mogas informed WVS late last night that it would withdraw its offer if WVS agreed to the

Committee's request to continue the hearing just one day to Friday, May 29<sup>th</sup>. At the hearing on the motion to approve bid procedures, the Court directed the United States Trustee to investigate whether a chapter 11 trustee should be appointed. Accordingly, emergency consideration of this Motion is appropriate.

### **JURISDICTION AND VENUE**

5. This Court has jurisdiction over these cases pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1334. This is a core proceeding under 28 U.S.C. § 157(b)(2)(A). Venue is proper in this district pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1408.

### **BACKGROUND**

6. In the early morning of January 24, 2020, a tragic explosion occurred at the WGM thermal spray coating facility. As a result, numerous parties began filing lawsuits in state court against the Debtors arising out of the January 24 incident.

7. On February 6, 2020 (the "Petition Date"), the Debtors each commenced a case by filing a petition for relief under chapter 11 of the Bankruptcy Code (the "Bankruptcy Case"). Both the Debtors continue to operate their business and manage their properties as a debtor in possession pursuant to section 1107(a) and 1108 of the Bankruptcy Code.

8. On February 21, 2020, the United States Trustee for the Southern District of Texas (the "U.S. Trustee") appointed the Committee in the WGM case pursuant to sections 1102(a) and 1102 (b)(1) of the Bankruptcy Code. The Committee consists of the following claimants: (i) Travis Horton, (ii) Massiel Nunez, (iii) Houston Corvette Service, (iv) Margarita Flores, (v) Phillip Burnam, (vi) Janette Thomas, and (vii) Gerardo Castorena, Jr.

9. As the Court is aware, the Committee has been concerned with John Watson's involvement in this case since it discovered his role in modifying the "loss payee" designation on

the Debtors' insurance policies only days before the petition date—for the benefit of an entity owned by his children (KMHJ Ltd.).

10. Until recently, the Committee's concerns were partially alleviated by the Debtors' representation that John Watson was not involved in the day-to-day operation of the estates, Bob White was the designated "estate representative" and Drew McManigle was being retained as the Debtors' financial advisor. Consistent with these representations, Bob White, the Debtors' chief operating officer, signed the petitions, the statements of financial affairs, the schedules and the first day declarations for both Debtors. For all practical purposes, until recently, Bob White was the Debtors representative and was making substantially all decisions related to these bankruptcy cases.<sup>1</sup>

11. On May 14, 2020, however, WVS received a letter of intent from Mogas to purchase WVS' assets which included a non-compete agreement to be executed by John Watson. The Committee has not seen this LOI, but, based on the JB Valve objection, John Watson would have directly received \$1 million from Mogas under this offer in exchange for executing the non-compete.

12. On May 15, 2020, WGM's counsel provided the Committee with a copy of an unexecuted asset purchase agreement for WVS' assets from JB Valve LLC ("JB Valve"), an entity created by Bob and Jason White for the purpose of attempting to acquire WVS' assets. JB Valve offered a substantially higher amount to be paid to the WVS estate than the Mogas bid, *and its offer did not involve any side agreement with John Watson*. To the contrary, the JB Valve bid seems premised on the Whites making a clean break with the Watsons.

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<sup>1</sup> WGM is owned approximately 63.8% by John Watson and 36.2% by the Whites. WVS is owned 70% by John Watson and 30% by the Whites.

13. Immediately upon receipt of the JB Valve APA, on May 15, 2020, John Watson terminated the employment of Bob and Jason White from both Debtors in clear retaliation for having undermined the insider kickback associated with the original Mogus offer.

14. Since John Watson's unilateral termination of the Whites, and self-promotion to "estate representative," the Debtors have pivoted dramatically on numerous important issues in these cases. First, the Debtors and the Committee were in the process of negotiating non-controversial motions related to bar date noticing, procedures for allowing lawsuits to serve as proofs of claim and related relief to ensure efficiencies and due process in these cases. Until days ago, these motions appeared to be largely agreed to by the Debtors and, in fact, were going to be filed as joint motions. However, on the eve of filing the motions, John Watson and his counsel interjected themselves into the negotiations and demanded modifications clearly aimed at limiting notice and potential claims against WVS. The only logical explanation for such requests is John Watson's belief that directing claims away from WVS and towards WGM increases the likelihood of a "surplus" in the WVS estate—which directly benefits him personally.

15. By way of further example, the Debtors previously filed a Motion to Pay Watson Grinding Receivables Collected on Watson Grinding's Behalf seeking authorization WVS to pay \$515,494.12—an amount which was paid to WVS by a customer for work performed by WGM. This motion was filed at a time when Bob White was still in control of the Debtors. Following White's termination by John Watson, WVS' counsel notified the Committee's counsel that John Watson was threatening to inexplicably withdraw the motion because John Watson did not want the funds to be transferred out of WVS to WGM. While counsel appears to have talked John Watson out of this position (the Court entered an order granting the Motion on May 27, 2020), this

is a further example of Debtors' counsel continued struggles to ensure a clearly conflicted estate representative is fulfilling his fiduciary duties.

16. Finally, just before 1:00 p.m. on May 27, 2020—and apparently at John Watson's direction, WVS filed an emergency motion seeking approval of bid procedures and bid protections for Mogas on a modified LOI (Doc. No. 183) (the "Bid Procedures Motion"). According to footnote 1 in the Bid Procedures Motion, Mogas had not yet submitted a signed APA to WVS when the motion was filed. The Bid Procedures Motion was set on less than 24 hours' notice for 8:30 a.m. on May 28, 2020.

17. The Committee's counsel immediately requested WVS to continue the hearing for at least one day so the Committee could evaluate the motion and the parties could continue to negotiate potential global case resolutions less drastic than the appointment of a chapter 11 trustee, such as limiting and terminating exclusivity. WVS' counsel originally agreed to continue the hearing and informed the Court's case manager of this decision. Later that evening, WVS' counsel informed the Committee's counsel that WVS could not agree to continue the hearing because Mogas threatened to pull its offer unless WVS went forward on the Bid Procedures Motion at 8:30 a.m. on May 28, 2020.

18. The Bid Procedures Motion seeks approval of an APA with Mogas (which no party in interest has seen and was not even included in WVS' exhibit list for the hearing) and bid protections for Mogas in the form of a \$100,000 break-up fee, a \$75,000 expense reimbursement, and a \$50,000 minimum initial overbid. The Bid Procedures Motion discloses that Mogas' offer includes \$300,000 to be paid to John Watson personally in exchange for a non-compete and a consulting agreement for an undisclosed sum for John Watson Jr. (Doc. No. 183 at p. 12).

**RELIEF REQUESTED**

19. Bankruptcy courts will leave a debtor in possession of its assets and business only when current management “can be depended upon to carry out the fiduciary responsibilities of a trustee.” *See Commodity Futures Trading Comm’n v. Weintraub*, 471 U.S. 343, 355 (1985). The Court can appoint a trustee either based on a finding of cause (11 U.S.C. § 1104(a)(1)) or based on it being in the interest of creditors (11 U.S.C. § 1104(a)(2)). Although section 1104(a)(1) expressly identifies four bases upon which “cause” may be found—fraud, dishonesty, incompetence and gross mismanagement—these enumerated grounds are not exhaustive, merely illustrative. *See, e.g., In re Cajun Elec.*, 191 B.R. at 661 (“It is clear that the grounds for cause are not limited to those enumerated in section 1104(a)(1).”).

20. The determination of whether cause exists to appoint a chapter 11 trustee is highly fact-intensive and requires the court to consider “whether the totality of the circumstances warrant appointment of a trustee.” *In re Sundale, Ltd.*, 400 B.R. 890, 900 (Bankr. S.D. Fla. 2009) (citing *In re Sharon Steel Corp.*, 871 F.2d 1217, 1228 (3d Cir. 1989)). Even if the Court does not find that “cause” exists to appoint a chapter 11 trustee under section 1104(a)(1), the Court has wide discretion to appoint a trustee under section 1104(a)(2) where, as here, doing so is in the best interests of the parties and the estate. *See also In re Cajun Elec. Power Cooperative, Inc.*, 191 B.R. 659, 661 (M.D. La. 1995) (“[u]nder [section 1104(a)(2)], there is a flexible standard for the Court to follow”).

21. In exercising its discretion to appoint a trustee under section 1104(a)(2), the Court may consider many factors, including: (i) the trustworthiness of the debtor; (ii) the debtor in possession’s past and present performance and prospects for the debtor’s rehabilitation; (iii) the confidence, or lack thereof, of the business community and of creditors in present management; and (iv) the benefits derived by the appointment of a trustee, balanced against the cost of the



appointment. *See, e.g., In re Cajun Elec.*, 191 B.R. at 661-62 (listing factors); *In re Ionosphere Clubs, Inc.*, 113 B.R. 164, 168 (Bankr. S.D.N.Y. 1990) (same).

22. The totality of circumstances, as articulated above, evidence that John Watson is not capable of fulfilling his fiduciary duties and is putting his personal and familial interests ahead of the interests of creditors. From the Committee's standpoint, the Court need only look at John Watson's immediate and unilateral termination of Bob White as the estates' representative upon his submission of a competing/superior bid that did not provide a \$1 million kickback to John Watson personally. This alone establishes that John Watson simply does not have the estate's interests in mind and is willing to retaliate against anyone who gets in the way of his personal agenda. John Watson's motivations are further evidenced by both his and his counsel's attempts at thwarting the legitimate objectives of estate professionals for John Watson's personal benefit. The Committee is concerned, based on extensive communications with Debtors' counsel, that estate professionals are being placed in the untenable position of answering to a client representative whose interests are not aligned with the fiduciary responsibilities of the Debtors. Given the state of the Debtors' business, the likely sale of the Debtors' only operating assets and the millions of dollars of claims asserted against the estates, John Watson cannot be left in charge.<sup>2</sup>

### **CONCLUSION**

23. Accordingly, the Committee respectfully requests that the Court enter orders appointing chapter 11 trustees in both cases and grant the Committee any other relief to which they may be entitled.

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<sup>2</sup> As further indication of the inherent conflicts existing between the two estates, on May 8, 2020, WGM's insurance defense counsel sent a demand letter to WVS' insurance defense counsel stating WGM's position that it is a named insured under \$26 million of WVS insurance policies. To date, the insurance companies have not responded to the tender letter. If they deny coverage, WGM may have to assert claims against WVS and also file an action for declaratory relief against the insurance companies and WVS to have this Court determine the coverage issue.

Dated: May 29, 2020.

Respectfully submitted,

PORTER HEDGES LLP

/s/ Joshua W. Wolfshohl

Joshua W. Wolfshohl

State Bar No. 24038592

Aaron J. Power

State Bar No. 24058058

1000 Main Street, 36th Floor

Houston, Texas 77002

(713) 226-6000

(713) 226-6248 (fax)

[jwolfshohl@porterhedges.com](mailto:jwolfshohl@porterhedges.com)

[apower@porterhedges.com](mailto:apower@porterhedges.com)

COUNSEL FOR THE OFFICIAL COMMITTEE  
OF JANUARY 24 CLAIMANTS

**CERTIFICATE OF CONFERENCE**

Committee counsel discussed the Motion and the relief sought with counsel for both Debtors prior to filing this Motion. The Debtors informed the Committee that they intend to promptly convene a board meeting following the filing of this Motion to determine the Debtors' position on the Motion.

/s/ Aaron J. Power

Aaron J. Power

**CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE**

This will certify that a true and correct copy of the foregoing document was forwarded by U.S. First Class Mail and via electronic transmission to all registered ECF users appearing in the case on May 29, 2020.

/s/ Joshua W. Wolfshohl

Joshua W. Wolfshohl

## SERVICE LIST

ERIN E JONES  
CHRISTOPHER R MURRAY  
JONES MURRAY & BEATTY LLP  
4119 MONTROSE STE 230  
HOUSTON TX 77006

STEPHEN DOUGLAS STATHAM  
OFFICE OF US TRUSTEE  
515 RUSK STE 3516  
HOUSTON TX 77002

ASTRO ALLOYS INC  
9155 EMMOTT RD  
HOUSTON TX 77040

BAKER BOTTS LLP  
910 LOUISIAN ST STE 3200  
HOUSTON TX 77002

C&M TECHNOLOGIES GROUP INC  
350 NORTH SAINT PAUL ST  
DALLAS TX 75201

EARL M JORGENSEN  
6201 LUMERDALE RD  
HOUSTON TX 77092

GULFCO FORGE COMPANY  
6817 INDUSTRIAL RD  
HOUSTON TX 77005

HALCO METALS  
9611 TELGE RD  
HOUSTON TX 77095

HUNTER CHEMICAL LLC  
220 COMMERCE DR  
STE 200  
FORT WASHINGTON PA 19034

LINEAGE ALLOYS  
1901 ELLIS SCHOOL RD  
BAYTOWN TX 77521

MATHESON TRI-GAS  
166 KEYSTONE DR  
MONTGOMERYVILLE PA 18936

NORTH AMERICAN HOGANAS CO  
111 HOGANAS WA  
HOLLSOPPLE PA 15935

NORTON ROSE FULBRIGHT  
1301 MCKINNEY ST STE 1500  
HOUSTON TX 77010

PARRISH INTERNATIONAL INC  
PO BOX 468  
HEMPSTEAD TX 77445

SCOTT STAINLESS SPECIALITIES  
501 GEORGIA AVENUE  
SOUTH HOUSTON TX 77587

TECHNICAL ENGINEERING LLC  
100 CHAPEL RD  
MANCHESTER CT 6042

THYSSENKRUPP  
ATTN: GENERAL COUNSEL  
111 W JACKSON BLVD  
CHICAGO IL 60604

TRICOR METALS  
3517 N LOOP 336 W  
CONROE TX 77304

VICTORY METALS  
4125 HOLLISTER RD  
HOUSTON TX 77080

VINATECH ENGINEERING  
7747 FORMULA PLACE  
SAN DIEGO CA 92121

WEBB INDUSTRIAL LLC  
2433 LOFTON TERRACE  
FORT WORTH TX 76109

WATSON VALVE SERVICES INC  
4525 GESSNER RD  
HOUSTON TX 77041

TEXAS CAPITAL BANK  
C/O TIMOTHY MILLION  
600 TRAVIS ST  
HOUSTON TX 77002

INTERNAL REVENUE SERVICE  
CENTRALIZED INSOLVENCY  
OPERATION  
PO BOX 7346  
PHILADELPHIA, PA 19101-7346

INTERNAL REVENUE SERVICE  
300 E 8TH ST  
MAIL STOP 5026AUS  
AUSTIN TX 78701

RICHARD A KINCHELOE  
ASSISTANT UNITED STATES ATTORNEY  
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF TEXAS  
1000 LOUISIANA ST STE 2300  
HOUSTON TX 77002

ABIGAIL RUSHING RYAN AAG  
OFFICE OF THE AG OF TEXAS  
BANKRUPTCY & COLLECTIONS DIV  
PO BOX 12548-MC 008  
AUSTIN TX 78711-2548

JASON B BINFORD  
OFFICE OF THE AG OF TEXAS  
BANKRUPTCY & COLLECTIONS DIV  
P O BOX 12548-MC 008  
AUSTIN TEXAS 78711-2548

MICHAEL I. RAMIREZ  
MCCOY LEAVITT ET. AL.  
20726 STONE OAK PKWY STE 116  
SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS 78232

J SCOTT DOUGLASS  
1811 BERING DR STE 420  
HOUSTON TEXAS 77057

MUHAMMAD AZIZ  
ABRAHAM WATKINS NICHOLS  
SORRELS AGOSTO AZIZ & STOGNER  
800 COMMERCE ST  
HOUSTON TEXAS 77002

JOHN P DILLMAN  
LINEBARGER GOGGAN BLAIR &  
SAMPSON LLP  
PO BOX 3064  
HOUSTON TX 77253-3064

AVISHAY MOSHENBERG  
MCDOWELL HETHERINGTON LLP  
1001 FANNIN STE 2700  
HOUSTON TX 7700

RANDALL J POELMA JR  
DOYEN SEBESTA & POELMA LLLP  
450 GEARS RD STE 350  
HOUSTON TX 77067

ELIZABETH C FREEMAN  
JACKSON WALKER LLP  
1401 MCKINNEY ST STE 1900  
HOUSTON TX 77010

RANDY W WILLIAMS  
BYMAN & ASSOCIATES PLLC  
7924 BRDWAY STE 104  
PEARLAND TX 775

L LEE THWEATT  
ONE GREENWAY PLAZA STE 100  
HOUSTON TX 77046-0102

STEPHEN R WALKER  
LAW OFFICES OF MANUEL SOLIS PC  
6657 NAVIGATION BLVD  
HOUSTON TX 77011

BYRON C ALFRED  
2019 WICHITA ST  
HOUSTON TX 77004

MATT L MARTIN  
ZEHL & ASSOCIATES PC  
2700 POST OAK BLVD STE 1000  
HOUSTON TX 77056

HENRY FLORES  
RAPP & KROCK PC  
1980 POST OAK BLVD STE 1200  
HOUSTON TEXAS 77056

JARROD B MARTIN  
MCDOWELL HETHERINGTON LLP  
1001 FANNIN STE 2700  
HOUSTON TX 77002

ERIKA L MORABITO  
FOLEY & LARDNER LLP  
3000 K ST NW STE 600  
WASHINGTON DC 20007

WILLIAM T SEBESTA  
DOYEN SEBESTA & POELMA LLLP  
450 GEARS RD STE 350  
HOUSTON TX 77067

RYAN E CHAPPLE  
CAIRN & SKARNULIS PLLC  
400 W 15<sup>TH</sup> ST STE 900  
AUSTIN TX 78701

ABIGAIL RUSHING RYAN AAG  
OFFICE OF THE AG OF TEXAS  
BANKRUPTCY & COLLECTIONS DIV  
PO BOX 12548-MC 008  
AUSTIN TX 78711-2548

JOSEPH D TERRY  
ONE GREENWAY PLAZA STE 100  
HOUSTON TX 77046-0102

GREGORY J FINNEY  
LAW OFFICES OF MANUEL SOLIS PC  
6657 NAVIGATION BLVD  
HOUSTON TX 77011

RYAN H ZEHL  
ZEHL & ASSOCIATES PC  
2700 POST OAK BLVD STE 1000  
HOUSTON TX 77056

GREGORY F COX  
MOSTYLN LAW  
3810 WEST ALABAMA ST  
HOUSTON TX 77027

KENNETH M KROCK  
RAPP & KROCK PC  
1980 POST OAK BLVD STE 1200  
HOUSTON TEXAS 77056

KATE H EASTERLING  
MCDOWELL HETHERINGTON LLP  
1001 FANNIN STE 2700  
HOUSTON TX 77002

HOLLAND N O'NEIL  
FOLEY & LARDNER LLP  
2021 MCKINNEY AVENUE STE 1600  
DALLAS TX 75201

BRUCE J RUZINSKY  
JACKSON WALKER LLP  
1401 MCKINNEY ST STE 1900  
HOUSTON TX 77010

TAYLOR R ROMERO  
CAIRN & SKARNULIS PLLC  
400 W 15<sup>TH</sup> ST STE 900  
AUSTIN TX 78701

JASON B BINFORD  
OFFICE OF THE AG OF TEXAS  
BANKRUPTCY & COLLECTIONS DIV  
P O BOX 12548-MC 008  
AUSTIN TEXAS 78711-2548

ANNA DEAN KAMINS  
KAMINS LAW FIRM PLLC  
2925 RICHMOND AVENUE STE 1200  
HOUSTON TX 77098

JUAN A SOLIS  
LAW OFFICES OF MANUEL SOLIS PC  
6657 NAVIGATION BLVD  
HOUSTON TX 77011

MATTHEW O GREENBERG  
ZEHL & ASSOCIATES PC  
2700 POST OAK BLVD STE 1000  
HOUSTON TX 77056

MICHAEL DOWNEY  
MOSTYLN LAW  
3810 WEST ALABAMA ST  
HOUSTON TX 77027

CATHRYN J SCHEXNAIDER  
MOSTYLN LAW  
3810 WEST ALABAMA ST  
HOUSTON TX 77027

CHANCE A MCMILLAN  
MCMILLAN FIRM PLLC  
440 LOUISIANA ST STE 1200  
HOUSTON TX 77002-1691

MATHEW MENDOZA  
MCMILLAN FIRM PLLC  
440 LOUISIANA ST STE 1200  
HOUSTON TX 77002-1691

ANTHONY G BUZBEE  
JP MORGAN CHASE TOWER  
600 TRAVIS ST STE 7300  
HOUSTON TX 77002

CHRISTOPHER J LEAVITT  
JP MORGAN CHASE TOWER  
600 TRAVIS ST STE 7300  
HOUSTON TX 77002

RYAN S PIGG  
JP MORGAN CHASE TOWER  
600 TRAVIS ST STE 7300  
HOUSTON TX 77002

JOHN J. RUTTER  
ROETZEL & ANDRESS, LPA  
222 SOUTH MAIN STREET  
AKRON, OH 44308

KARL P LONG  
800 COMMERCE ST  
HOUSTON TX 77002

BILAAL BADAT  
4151 SOUTHWEST FWY STE 320  
HOUSTON TX 77027

MARTY HERRING  
MARTY HERRING & ASSOCIATES  
1616 S VOSS RD STE 890  
HOUSTON TX 77057

CAMERON R TEBO  
MARTY HERRING & ASSOCIATES  
1616 S VOSS RD STE 890  
HOUSTON TX 77057

MICHAEL TATE BARKLEY  
BAIN & BARKLEY  
14090 SOUTHWEST FWY STE 450  
SUGAR LAND TX 77478

KARL R SCHNEIDER  
BAIN & BARKLEY  
14090 SOUTHWEST FWY STE 450  
SUGAR LAND TX 77478

BRETT ANTHONY  
ANTHONY PETERSON LLP  
500 NORTH WATER ST STE 1000  
CORPUS CHRISTI TX 78401

ADAM ANTHONY  
ANTHONY PETERSON LLP  
500 NORTH WATER ST STE 1000  
CORPUS CHRISTI TX 78401

DONALD PETERSON  
ANTHONY PETERSON LLP  
500 NORTH WATER ST STE 1000  
CORPUS CHRISTI TX 78401

RUBEN BONILLA JR  
BONILLA & CHAPPA PC  
2600 GESSNER RD STE 136  
HOUSTON TX 77080

VINCE RYAN  
HARRIS COUNTY ATTORNEY  
ENVIRONMENTAL GROUP  
1019 CONGRESS 15TH FL  
HOUSTON TX 77002

SARAH JANE UTLEY  
HARRIS COUNTY ATTORNEY  
ENVIRONMENTAL GROUP  
1019 CONGRESS 15TH FLOOR  
HOUSTON TX 77002

KATHY PORTER  
AIR COMPLIANCE COORDINATOR  
HARRIS COUNTY POLLUTION  
CONTROL SVCS DEPT  
101 SOUTH RICHEY STE H  
PASADENA TX 77506

ROBERT S KWOK  
9805 KATY FWY STE 850  
HOUSTON TX 77024

J RYAN LOYA  
9805 KATY FWY STE 850  
HOUSTON TX 77024

JOSHUA R LEAL  
9805 KATY FWY STE 850  
HOUSTON TX 77024

ALEX P BOYLHART  
9805 KATY FWY STE 850  
HOUSTON TX 77024

WILLIAM W HOKE (OF COUNSEL)  
9805 KATY FWY STE 850  
HOUSTON TX 77024

HUSEIN HADI  
SEDRICK STAGG  
7100 REGENCY SQUARE BLVD STE 140  
HOUSTON TX 77036

JAMIL THOMAS  
SEDRICK STAGG  
7100 REGENCY SQUARE BLVD STE 140  
HOUSTON TX 77036

CARNEGIE H MIMS III  
SEDRICK STAGG  
7100 REGENCY SQUARE BLVD STE 140  
HOUSTON TX 77036

ERIC DICK LLM  
3701 BROOKWOODS DR  
HOUSTON TX 77092

JOEL C SIMON  
FERNELIUS SIMON MACE  
ROBERTSON PERDUE PLLC  
4119 MONTROSE BLVD STE 500  
HOUSTON TX 77006

STEPHEN M FERNELIUS  
FERNELIUS SIMON MACE  
ROBERTSON PERDUE PLLC  
4119 MONTROSE BLVD STE 500  
HOUSTON TX 77006

POTTS LAW FIRM  
3737 BUFFALO SPEEDWAY STE 1900  
HOUSTON TX 77098

PEGAH RAHGOZAR  
2825 WILCREST DR STE 515  
HOUSTON TX 77045

JASON A ITKIN  
ARNOLD & ITKIN LLP  
6009 MEMORIAL DR  
HOUSTON TX 77007

ADAM D LEWIS  
ARNOLD & ITKIN LLP  
6009 MEMORIAL DR  
HOUSTON TX 77007

MICHAEL A DOWNEY  
MOSTYN LAW  
3810 WEST ALABAMA ST  
HOUSTON TX 77027

PAUL B KERLIN  
GREENBERG TRAUIG LLP  
1000 LOUISIANA ST STE 1700  
HOUSTON TX 77002

JAMES R JONES  
4185 TECHNOLOGY FOREST BLVD  
STE 160  
THE WOODLANDS TX 77381

MATHESON TRI-GAS INC  
ATTN: GENERAL COUNSEL  
150 ALLEN RD - STE 302  
BASKING RIDGE NJ 07920

KEVIN M MADDEN  
LAW OFFICES OF KEVIN M MADDEN  
5225 KATY FWY STE 520  
HOUSTON TX 77007

RYAN M PERDUE  
FERNELIUS SIMON MACE  
ROBERTSON PERDUE PLLC  
4119 MONTROSE BLVD STE 500  
HOUSTON TX 77006

MICHAEL J BINS  
POTTS LAW FIRM  
3737 BUFFALO SPEEDWAY STE 1900  
HOUSTON TX 77098

LESTER B NICHOLS III  
2825 WILCREST DR STE 515  
HOUSTON TX 77045

J KYLE FINDLEY  
ARNOLD & ITKIN LLP  
6009 MEMORIAL DR  
HOUSTON TX 77007

CHRISTOPHER L BELL  
GREENBERG TRAUIG LLP  
1000 LOUISIANA ST STE 1700  
HOUSTON TX 77002

CAROLINE L MAIDA  
MOSTYN LAW  
3810 WEST ALABAMA ST  
HOUSTON TX 77027

CHRISTOPHER M LAVIGNE  
GREENBERG TRAUIG LLP  
2200 ROSS AVE STE 5200  
DALLAS TX 75201

JOHN V MCCOY  
MCCOY LEAVITT & LASKEY  
N19 W242000 RIVERWOOD DR  
STE 125  
WAUKESHA WI 53188

AUTOMATION PLUS  
ATTN: FRANK LOMELO  
8930 LAWNGDALE ST STE F  
HOUSTON TX 77012

MARK W MORAN  
MUNCK WILSON MANDALA LLP  
12770 COIT RD STE 600  
DALLAS TX 75251

DEREK H POTTS  
POTTS LAW FIRM  
3737 BUFFALO SPEEDWAY STE 1900  
HOUSTON TX 77098

RILEY L BURNETT JR  
BURNETT LAW FIRM  
3737 BUFFALO SPEEDWAY STE 1850  
HOUSTON TX 77098

KURT B ARNOLD  
ARNOLD & ITKIN LLP  
6009 MEMORIAL DR  
HOUSTON TX 77007

KALA F SELLERS  
ARNOLD & ITKIN LLP  
6009 MEMORIAL DR  
HOUSTON TX 77007

GREGORY F COX  
MOSTYN LAW  
3810 WEST ALABAMA ST  
HOUSTON TX 77027

MARY-OLGA LOVETT  
GREENBERG TRAUIG LLP  
1000 LOUISIANA ST STE 1700  
HOUSTON TX 77002

KARL D BURRER  
GREENBERG TRAUIG LLP  
1000 LOUISIANA ST STE 1700  
HOUSTON TX 77002

ANA M ENE  
CLARK LOVE & HUTSON PLLC  
440 LOUISIANA STE 1700  
HOUSTON TX 77002

ADAM D PEAVY  
CLARK LOVE & HUTSON PLLC  
440 LOUISIANA STE 1700  
HOUSTON TX 77002

ARC SPECIALTIES INC  
ATTN: L DON KNIGHT  
8100 WASHINGTON STE 1000  
HOUSTON TX 77007

ARC SPECIALTIES INC  
1730 STEBBINS DR  
HOUSTON TX 7704

CENTERPOINT ENERGY SERVICE  
COMPANY LCC  
ATTN: GENERAL COUNSEL  
1111 LOUISIANA ST 39TH FLOOR  
HOUSTON TX 77002

CENTERPOINT ENERGY SERVICES  
INC  
ATTN: GENERAL COUNSEL  
1111 LOUISIANA ST  
39TH FLOOR  
HOUSTON TX 77002

CENTERPOINT ENERGY RESOURCES  
CORP  
ATTN: GENERAL COUNSEL  
1111 LOUISIANA ST 39TH FLOOR  
HOUSTON TX 77002

CENTERPOINT ENERGY GAS  
SERVICES INC – NATURAL GAS  
ATTN: GENERAL COUNSEL  
1111 LOUISIANA ST 39TH FLOOR  
HOUSTON TX 77002

STM & ASSOCIATES  
8554 KATY FWY STE 112  
HOUSTON TX 77024

3M  
3M CORPORATE HEADQUARTERS  
2501 HUDSON RD  
MAPLEWOOD MN 55144

DETCON  
3M CENTER BLDG 224-5N40  
SAINT PAUL MN 55144-1001

DETCON  
3200 RESEARCH FOREST DR  
THE WOODLANDS TX 77381-4219

DETCON  
4055 TECHNOLOGY FOREST BLVD  
THE WOODLANDS TX 77381

FIRESTONE CRYOGENIC EQUIPMENT  
14954 EAST DR  
CONROE TX 77302-6600

FIRESTONE CRYOGENIC EQUIPMENT  
ATTN: LINDA PLUMMER  
12446 CUTTEN RD  
HOUSTON TX 77066

RADNOR  
AIRGAS INC  
259 NORTH RADNOR-CHESTER RD  
STE 100  
RADNOR PA 19087-5283

OLDHAM A/K/A TELEDYNE GAS & FLAME  
AMERICAS – THE WOODLANDS  
DETCON INC  
4055 TECHNOLOGY FOREST BLVD  
THE WOODLANDS TX 77381

WESTERN INTERNATIONAL GAS &  
CYLINDER INC  
ATTN: DENISE C HAUGEN  
7173 HIGHWAY 159 E PO BOX 668  
BELLVILLE TX 77418

MILLER SCAMARDI AND CARRABA  
ATTN: DAVID MILLER  
6525 WASHINGTON AVE  
HOUSTON TEXAS 77007

B-W GRINDING SERVICE, INC.  
5807 NUNN ST.  
HOUSTON, TX 77087

NATIONAL ALLOY SOLUTIONS  
C/O GONZALEZ & ASSOCIATES  
ATTN: EDWARD GONZALEZ  
2205 FULTON ST  
HOUSTON TX 77009

KENNAMETAL INC  
ATTN: MICHELLE R KEATING  
525 WILLIAM PENN PLACE STE 3300  
PITTSBURGH PA 15219

TECHNICAL ENGINEERING LLC  
100 CHAPEL RD  
MANCHESTER CT 06042

VERTECS  
8402 RAYSON RD  
HOUSTON TX 77080

ABB  
13609 INDUSTRIAL RD GATE 5  
COMPLEX 3G WEST  
HOUSTON TX 77015

ACCUWELD INC.  
845 BUSCHONG  
HOUSTON, TX 77039-1001

AMERICAN EXPRESS  
THREE WORLD FINANCIAL CENTER  
200 VESEY S  
NEW YORK, NY 10285

BASS TOOL & SUPPLY, INC.  
2300 FAIRWAY PARK DR.  
HOUSTON, TX 77092

CARBIDE & METAL, C&M TECH LLC  
7425 CARBIDE LANE  
HOUSTON, TX 77040

CORROSION MATERIALS  
22416 NETWORK PLACE  
CHICAGO, IL 60673

GROVES INDUSTRIAL SUPPLY  
7301 PINEMONT DR.  
HOUSTON, TX 77040

GULF COAST METAL SALES  
PO BOX 7310  
HOUSTON, TX 77248

HOUSTON PLATING COMPANY LLP  
PO BOX 418  
SOUTH HOUSTON, TX 77587

LARK HEAT TREAT, INC.  
6640 MAYNARD  
HOUSTON, TX 77041

LIBERTY FORGE, INC.  
PO DRAWER 1210  
LIBERTY, TX 77575

MATHESON TRI-GAS, INC.  
10430 MULA ROAD  
STAFFORD, TX 77477

MYERS TECHNOLOGY CO. LLC  
2150 TOUCHY AVE.  
ELK GROVE VILLAGE, IL 60007

NATIONAL SPECIALTY ALLOWS  
18250 KEITH HARROW  
HOUSTON, TX 77084

PARISH INTERNATIONAL, INC.  
1075 ZACH RAD  
HEMPSTEAD, TX 77445

THYSSENKRUP MATERIALS, NA  
10648 WEST LITTLE YORK RD  
HOUSTON, TX 77041

PT HUAYUE NICKEL COBALT  
GEDUNG WISMA MULIA LT. 41 JI  
.JEND GATOT  
SUBROTO NO. 42, KUNINGAN BARAT, MAMPANG  
PRAPATAN. 12710 JAKARTA,  
INDONESIA

R&M FORGE & FITTINGS  
6455 WESCO WAY  
HOUSTON, TX 77041

RS MACHINE COMPANY, LLC  
6926 GUHN ROAD  
HOUSTON, TX 77040

VERTECS  
PO BOX 801523  
HOUSTON, TX 77280

VICTORY METALS, LLC  
12335 KINGSRIDE LN  
HOUSTON, TX 77024

VINATECH INDUSTRIES, INC.  
5439 BRITTMORE RD.  
HOUSTON, TX 77041

WEB INDUSTRIAL DIAMOND CO. INC.  
2117 N. HOUSTON AVE.  
PEARLAND, TX 77581

JACK SKAGGS  
JASON S. SCHULZE  
LYONDELLBASELL TOWER  
1221 MCKINNEY, STE. 2900  
HOUSTON, TEXAS 77010

ACCROSEAL  
316 BRIGGS STREET  
VICKSBURG, MI 49097

MSO SEALS & GASKETS INC.  
4702 STEFFANI LANE  
HOUSTON, TX 77041

SCORE VALVE SERVICES INC.  
BUILDING B  
6410 LANGFIELD ROAD  
HOUSTON, TX 77092

THE NUT PLACE  
6605 GESSNER ROAD  
HOUSTON, TX 77040

WATSON VALVE SERVICES AUSTRALIA  
13 LINK CRESENT  
COOLUM BEACH, QUEENSLAND 4573

AFCO  
5600 NORTH RIVER ROAD SUITE 400  
DES PLAINES, IL 60018

AIV, LPL  
7140 W. SAM HOUSTON PKWY N  
SUITE 100  
HOUSTON, TX 77040

AMERICAN HELI-ARC  
5009 PINEMONT DR  
HOUSTON, TX 77092

AMUR HMP, LLC  
5, MASHINOSTROITELIEI SHOSSE, AMURSK  
KHABAROVSK KRAI, THE RUSSIAN  
FEDERATION  
682640

DIRECT BOLT AND SUPPLY  
7117 BELGOLDSUITE D  
HOUSTON, TX 77066

EGC ENTERPRISES  
140 PARKER CT  
CHARDON, OH 44024

GARLOCK SEALING TECH  
13288 COLLECTION CENTER DR  
CHICAGO, IL 60693

GHX INDUSTRIAL LLC  
3440 SOUTH SAM HOUSTON PARKWAY  
SUITE 300  
HOUSTON, TX 77047

GRAINGER  
PO BOX 419267  
KANSAS CITY, MO 64141

HYTORC  
12420 TEXACO ROAD  
HOUSTON, TX 77013



INDUSTRIAL BEARING AND SERVICES  
PO BOX 41325  
HOUSTON, TX 77241

LAMONS GASKET COMPANY  
7300 AIRPORT BLVD  
HOUSTON, TX 77061

SUHM SPRING WORKS, LTD  
14650 HEATHROW FOREST PARKWAY  
HOUSTON, TX 77032

SURFACE PREPARATION  
5973 SOUTH LOOP EAST  
HOUSTON, TX 77033

TEADIT  
10545 RED BLUFF ROAD  
PASADENA, TX 77507

U-LINE, INC.  
2200 S. LAKESIDE DRIVE  
CHICAGO, IL 60693

UNIVERSE TECHNICAL TRANSLATE  
9225 KATY FREEWAYSUITE 400  
HOUSTON, TX 77024

VANAIRE INC  
840 CLARK DRIVE  
GLADSTONE, MI 49837

ERNEST P. GIEGER, JR.  
BRENDAN P. DOHERTY  
GIEGER, LABORDE & LAPEROUSE, LLC  
5151 SAN FELIPE STREET, SUITE 750  
HOUSTON, TEXAS 77056

MATTHEW B. PROBUS  
WAUSON | PROBUS  
ONE SUGAR CREEK CENTER BLVD.,  
SUITE 880  
SUGAR LAND, TEXAS 77478

JOHN ROBERT JONES  
J. R. JONES LAW PLLC  
6026 REMSON HOLLOW LANE  
KATY, TX 77494

Watson Grinding & Manufacturing Co.  
4525 Gessner Road  
Houston, TX 77041